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Revisiting the Debate about Public Service Media Exceptionalism

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ABSTRACT

The development of public service broadcasters (PSBs) in the 20th century was framed around debates about its difference compared to commercial broadcasting. These debates navigated between two poles. One concerned the relationship between non-commercial sources of funding and the role played by statutory Charters as guarantors of the independence of PSBs. The other concerned the relationship between PSBs being both a complementary and a comprehensive service, although there are tensions inherent in this duality.

In the 21st century, as reconfigured public service media organisations (PSMs) operate across multiple platforms in a convergent media environment, how are these debates changing, if at all? Is the case for PSM “exceptionalism” changed with Web-based services, catch-up TV, podcasting, ancillary product sales, and commissioning of programs from external sources in order to operate in highly diversified cross-media environments? Do the traditional assumptions about non-commercialism still hold as the basis for different forms of PSM governance and accountability?

This paper will consider the question of PSM exceptionalism in the context of three reviews into Australian media that took place over 2011-2012: the Convergence Review undertaken through the Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy; the National Classification Scheme Review undertaken by the Australian Law Reform Commission; and the Independent Media Inquiry that considered the future of news and journalism.

KEYWORDS

Public broadcasting; public service media; independence; convergence; media policy; Australia.

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Introduction

In the course of what has been described as the ‘convergent media policy moment’ in Australia during 2011-2012, one question that hovered around the various public inquiries into the future regulatory framework for Australian media was where the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) and the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) would sit in a revised media policy environment. For the most part, this debate took place outside of the public domain, and was not at the forefront of public commentary about the ABC and the SBS at the time, in contrast to an issue such as who should run the Australia Network international television service.

The question that emerged in all of the three public inquiries that took place over 2011-2012 – the Convergence Review into future Australian media and communications legislation, the National Classification Scheme Review being undertaken by the Australian Law Reform Commission, and the Independent Media Inquiry into future arrangements for news and journalism, also known as the Finkelstein Review. How they approached the question, and how the ABC and the SBS participated in these inquiries, provides insights into how these organisations are being thought about as they shift from being platform-based public service broadcasters (PSBs) to being multi-platform public service media (PSM) in a convergent media environment.

I have used the term *public service broadcaster exceptionalism* to capture the proposition that PSBs need to be exempted from legislative obligations that apply to other media outlets, particularly commercial broadcasters. While they may in fact

meet the obligations in question, the important point is that they are not forced to do so by government. Rather, the decision to do so is one reached independently by the Board of the PSB in question, without government coercion or possible sanction. If it were to be otherwise, this would negate the independence of the public broadcaster. The obligations of the public broadcaster to the government, as representative of the people and the nation, are set out in its legislative Charter and it is its performance against its Charter obligations that provides benchmarks that determine its accountability. To set additional legislative obligations, it is argued, would undercut this structural relationship between public service broadcasters, the government of the day, and the nation as a whole.

The Traditional Case for PSB Exceptionalism

The traditional case for public service broadcaster exceptionalism rests upon two core propositions. The first is that they have *prescribed forms of accountability* to the public by virtue of the legislative basis on which they were established (their Charter obligations), and it is that public accountability to the standards of their Charter, rather than maximising advertising revenues or audience share, that provides the *raison d'être* for their everyday operations. By contrast, commercial broadcasters are expected to be seeking to maximise audiences and/or revenues, and their obligations to meet regulatory standards are a response to perceived market failures (e.g. under-supply of particular forms of content) or in order to meet perceived community standards (e.g. program classification requirements). This does not inevitably mean that they do not derive revenues from commercial sources or that they do not seek the highest possible audience share with programming. It is to say that meeting Charter

obligations must be their primary motivator; for commercial media, by contrast, it is presumed that meeting legislative obligations is a secondary consideration, and a cost of doing business in the media industry.

The second factor concerns the expectations about PSBs providing a *comprehensive service*. The idea of a comprehensive service can be understood in two senses. There is the expectation that PSBs provide a full spectrum of programming, particularly those with ‘merit good’ elements (arts, documentary, children’s, religious, science) and those that serve a national public sphere (news and current affairs in particular, but also documentaries and history programs). There is also the expectation that PSBs should not be a purely complementary service – screening programs in genres of little interest to the commercial broadcasters – but that they should seek out the whole national community.

The United States Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) is often cited as providing a salutary tale about the risk of being ‘ghettoised’ in ‘minority’ programming that attracts low ratings. Other PSBs, such as the BBC in the U.K. and the ABC in Australia, make much of their ability to reach all Australians with a diverse suite of programs ranging from the popular to the more specialist. Tracey (1998: 27) described this approach to programming as driven by ‘the desire to make good programs popular and popular programs good’, while understanding that ‘serving the national diversity of a society is not the same as “giving the people what they want”’.

In practice, as we know, these distinctions become hard to sustain. Jacka (2003) has persuasively argued that principles that are identified as being unique to PSBs –

fostering a national culture, promoting civic discourse, achieving the highest standards of program quality or holding the powerful accountable – are frequently achieved through the programs of commercial broadcasters, particularly in a multichannel environment where these can be ‘niche’ services, and the case for PSBs cannot rest upon their being the sole source of ‘good’ media product.

The flip side is that there is a great deal on the programming schedules of PSBs that is intended to maximise audience reach. A program such as ABC TV’s *Spicks and Specks*, for instance, joins a long list of ABC variety programs over the years that could easily be envisaged as screening on the commercial networks. In radio, these dichotomies have been held together by different types of station – the overlap between audiences for Radio National, local radio services, Classic FM and Triple J has historically not been great – but the ABC has not been able to go down the multichannel path in television until very recently, and the strategy it has adopted for its four channels does not replicate the popular/quality dichotomy at all.

The SBS is in a more complex relationship to these debates, due both to its distinctively multicultural remit, its interpretation of that remit as being a general interest broadcaster appealing to a multicultural Australia rather than a multi-ethnic broadcaster, and its being an advertiser-supported service since the mid-1990s (Flew, 2011). Ang *et. al.* (2010) argued that SBS Television has acted as ‘a force for integration . . . bringing together various viewpoints and experiences within a common public sphere’ (Ang *et. al.*, 2010: 7). They understood the relationship between SBS’s multicultural remit and its programming and network branding

strategies as revolving around three conceptions of multiculturalism and three types of programming:

1. *Ethno-multiculturalism*, with programs focused on the particular needs and interests of migrants and ethnic communities, particularly through programming in languages other than English;
2. *Cosmopolitan multiculturalism* and ‘art-house’ or ‘activist’ programming, that encourages all Australians to embrace global cultural diversity through innovative high-quality programming sourced from around the world, or locally produced programs that aim to trigger wider community debates.
3. *Popular multiculturalism*, that is less about promoting multicultural diversity, but more about presenting cultural diversity as a feature of mainstream Australian culture. This strategy, as it developed over the 2000s, evolved into programming strategies that were clearly about maximising audiences and had nothing to do with Australian multiculturalism, such as the animated comedy *South Park* and the British car program *Top Gear*.

Responding to the Digital Challenge

As a general rule, PSBs were among the earliest broadcasters to respond to the pending challenges of digital media and the Internet, and their responses were often quite enthusiastic. The ABC had established ABC Online as well as a multimedia development unit as early as 1995 (Inglis, 2006: 349); by the late 1990s, ABC Online

had become established as providing ‘a sense of security based on the user’s pre-existent understanding of her/his relation with the broadcast ABC’ and enabling Australian Internet users to draw upon ‘the security offered by the ABC “brand” ... to make sense of the chaotic excess of the World Wide Web’ (Burns, 2008: 394). A measure of the degree to which ABC Online had by this time become integrated into the overall ecology of the public broadcaster was seen with the ability to resist the proposal in 1999 from ABC Board member Michael Kroger to part-privatise ABC Online in order to generate new revenue for programming, on the basis that it was now indivisible from the ABC as a whole. As the media sector as a whole came to terms with the convergent digital environment, with varying degrees of success, there is little doubt that, in retrospect, the ABC was ahead of the pack in its integration of online operations into the established media platforms.

For PSBs, while some of the original discourse of digital media concerned the possibility of doing “more with less” in a highly constrained fiscal environment, the discussion has turned to one of how to reach more of the nation – and reach beyond the nation – by using the new platforms in different ways. The online environment has provided the ABC, and to a lesser degree the SBS¹, not only with new outlets for their content, but with:

1. New ways of sourcing content, through user-led initiatives such as *ABC Pool*;
2. New ways of interacting with the service, through online news, information and comment sites such as *The Drum*; and

3. New ways of approaching long-established questions, such as the role of ABC Local multimedia ‘hubs’ in promoting local participation, and redressing the recurring tension between centralisation of services in a small number of capital cities and the need to provide media services for the whole nation.

The political and funding environment for the ABC and SBS has been a favourable one under the Labor governments in power since 2007. The Review of National Broadcasting commissioned by the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, Sen. Stephen Conroy, provided a ringing endorsement of national public broadcasting and its role in the Australian media environment (DBCDE, 2009). It stressed ‘the importance of enhancing the national broadcasters’ new media offerings alongside their traditional radio and television platforms’, and committed to enabling the ABC to develop a dedicated children’s channel as part of its digital multichannel offerings. It restated core objectives for PSBs in the new digital environment, accelerated by the Government’s commitment to a National Broadband Network (NBN), as including:

- Universality—enabling all Australians to access their services regardless of geography or income,
- Localism—allowing people with similar interests to communicate and participate in local communities, and
- Innovation—providing diverse and thought-provoking content that challenges conventional thinking and harnesses Australia’s creative endeavour and talent.

The Report also argued that ‘the national broadcasters have repeatedly demonstrated their capacity to harness technology to fulfil these functions and take creative and technology risks without the commercial imperatives of other media organisations’ (DBCDE, 2009: 16). At the same time, this commitment has not as yet entailed legislative changes to the ABC and SBS Charters that would more fully recognize their current status as public service media organisations (PSMs) rather than as providers of ‘radio and television services’ who also have online activities.

Reviewing Media Policy for Convergence

The 2011-2012 period from has been an unusually active one in Australian media and cultural policy, which I have described elsewhere as a ‘convergent media policy moment’ akin to the ‘cultural policy moment of the early 1990s (Flew, 2012). The major inquiries that have taken place included:

- The *Convergence Review*, an independent inquiry undertaken through the Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, which was asked to ‘review the operation of media and communications legislation in Australia and to assess its effectiveness in achieving appropriate policy objectives for the convergent era’ (Convergence Review: Final Report, 2012, p.110). It released its Final Report in April 2012;
- The *Review of the National Classification Scheme* undertaken by the Australian Law Reform Commission, whose final report, *Classification – Content Regulation and Convergent Media* (ALRC, 2012), was tabled in Parliament in March 2012.

- The *Independent Media Inquiry*, established by the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, Senator Stephen Conroy, to review the adequacy of media codes of practice and related matters in September 2011. This Inquiry was chaired by Hon. Ray Finkelstein QC, and its Report was delivered to the Minister in February 2012 (Independent Inquiry into the Media and Media Regulation, 2012).

These coincided with a plethora of other reviews of areas from interactive gambling to mobile phone call pricing, the development of a new National Cultural Policy, and – from June 2012 – a review of Australia’s copyright laws, conducted by the ALRC.

All of these reviews deal, in different ways, with the challenges presented to platform-based media policy and regulation by media convergence. The Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) defined convergence as ‘the phenomenon where digitisation of content, as well as standards and technologies for the carriage and display of digital content, are blurring the traditional distinctions between broadcasting and other media across all elements of the supply chain, for content generation, aggregation, distribution and audiences’ (ACMA, 2011: 7). The Convergence Review observed that:

Australia’s media landscape is changing rapidly. Today Australians have access to a greater range of communications and media services than ever before. Developments in technology and increasing broadband speeds have led to the emergence of innovative services not previously imagined. ... Users are increasingly at the centre of content service delivery. They are creating

their own content and uploading it to social media platforms [and] they are controlling what content they want to view and when they want to view it Despite these dramatic changes, Australia's policy and regulatory framework for content services is still focused on the traditional structures of the 1990s—broadcasting and telecommunications. The distinction between these categories has become increasingly blurred and these regulatory frameworks have outlived their original purpose. These frameworks now run the risk of inhibiting the evolution of communications and media services (DBCDE, 2012a: vii).

At the heart of this challenge is the disjuncture between platform-based media regulations, which presume vertically integrated industry and content 'silos', and media convergence that is breaking the link which media content and services have to particular delivery platforms. The resulting question is how to move from sector-specific media regulations, which generate a series of 'broken concepts' (ACMA, 2011) as technological and industry changes undermine the distinctions between categories, towards what the ALRC referred to as *platform-neutral* regulations, that 'minimise platform-based distinctions to the greatest degree possible, in order to maintain an adaptive regulatory framework that can be oriented towards future media developments' (ALRC, 2012: 75).

The dilemma, in terms of debates about PSBs, is that their uniqueness has been historically founded upon platform-based distinctions. In order to assess the worth of the ABC and SBS we look, not only to their Charters and how well they are meeting those obligations, but to their activities in comparison to the commercial broadcasters.

As Richard Collins has argued in the European context, ‘recognition of “the public as audience” did not come about spontaneously, but as a consequence of competition with commercial broadcasting; that is, through public service broadcasters’ presence *in the market* (Collins, 2004: 44). In Australia, a critical assessment of the performance of ABC news and current affairs may arise when major investigative stories are broken on the commercial networks, as was the case with programs such as *Sunday* and *60 Minutes* in the 1980s and 1990s. By the same token, the continuing relevance of programs such as *The 7.30 Report*, *Four Corners* and *Lateline* may be gauged by what constitutes “current affairs” on *Today Tonight* or *A Current affair* (see e.g. Turner, 2005). The point is that the appraisal of the worth of PSBs is never simply normative; it is also relational, and the ‘other’ to which it has been compared has traditionally been the commercial broadcasters.

In a convergent media environment, this begins to change. The ABC and SBS as news and information providers are no longer being compared simply to the radio and television networks, but to the newspaper web sites, sites such as *Crikey*, and a plethora of blogs and other online opinion sites. Similarly, the ABC children’s online portal is best understood, not in comparison with the children’s TV offerings of the Australian commercial TV networks, but alongside the big global portals developed by Disney, CBeebies and CBBC, and Nickelodeon. As PSBs morph into PSM, the criteria through which we view public service media exceptionalism necessarily shifts, as it is viewed across multiple platforms, rather than through the prism of radio or television.

Australian Law Reform Commission National Classification Scheme Review

Amidst over 2,300 submissions received by the ALRC in response to its May 2011 Issues Paper on the National Classification Scheme, one group that did not appear overly concerned were the public broadcasters. The ABC did not lodge a formal submission, and the SBS's response to the Issues Paper was largely concerned to restate the case for maintaining co-regulatory arrangements for television – as all submissions from the television industry were keen to do – and to recommend that the classification field as a whole should be overseen by a single regulator, preferably the ACMA (SBS, 2011).

By contrast, the Discussion Paper released by the ALRC in September 2011 attracted considerable critical comment, with the ABC and SBS preparing a joint submission, and concerns about the Inquiry and its 'overly prescriptive' approach appearing in the print media and being sourced to the public broadcasters (Bodey, 2011). The particular concern that the ABC and SBS had with the ALRC's Discussion Paper was that 'the strong implication ... [was] that it is the ALRC's intention that the new classification regime apply to the national broadcasters in the same way as it would apply to any other media content provider' (ABC and SBS, 2011: 1). Since it was the intention of the ALRC's Discussion Paper that a platform-neutral approach to media classification entailed a definition of 'media content provider' that was not platform-based, meaning that:

Bringing television content within the scheme would require the new scheme to encompass some matters currently dealt with by other parts of the

Broadcasting Services Act, the *Australian Broadcasting Corporation Act* and the *Special Broadcasting Service Act* ... [but] the new National Classification Scheme would govern television content only in so far as it relates to classification. Other content matters would continue to be regulated by the ACMA under the *Broadcasting Services Act* and codes (ALRC, 2011: 78).

As the response of the ABC and SBS to this proposition represents perhaps the clearest statement of the case for public service exceptionalism, it is worth quoting at length:

Such an approach would run counter to established public policy, which aims to minimise the opportunity and potential for government to direct or otherwise interfere with the editorial decision-making processes of the public broadcasters. The ABC and SBS, in carrying out their respective Charter activities, are required to meet the standards set out in laws which have been purpose-built for each national broadcaster, namely the *Australian Broadcasting Corporation 1983* (“ABC Act”) and the *Special Broadcasting Service Act 1991* (“SBS Act”). Standard setting and enforcement of these standards is largely left to the public broadcasters who, as publicly-funded statutory bodies corporate, operate within a wider accountability framework. Any supplemental regulation by external bodies has always been light touch and designed to ensure the editorial independence and institutional autonomy of the national broadcasters. As a result, the ABC and SBS are not subject to the current National Classification Scheme or the associated regulatory arrangements that apply to other bodies, such as commercial or community

television broadcasters. Making them subject to the proposed new National Classification Scheme would thus represent a significant and historical change to the established accountability and governance mechanisms that apply to public broadcasters in Australia. The Scheme would significantly reduce their independence and increase the regulatory burden imposed on public broadcasters relative to other media participants (ABC and SBS, 2011: 1-2).

Putting aside the claim about regulatory burden, which is debatable, the core proposition here was that including the national public broadcasters within a National Classification Scheme ‘would mark a significant and worrying deviation from their established accountability frameworks and a potential threat to their editorial independence’ (ABC and SBS, 2011: 2). Such independence ‘prevents public broadcasters from being used as instruments of power by the Government of the day’, as well as enabling them to ‘take chances with programs that commercial ... broadcasters cannot or will not support’ (ABC and SBS, 2011: 3, 4). As such it was argued that:

The national broadcasters should not be subject to the same regulatory scheme as that applying to other media providers—over and above the regulatory obligations already applying under public broadcasting laws and public sector governance arrangements. Such a blurring may lead to public broadcasters adopting a risk-averse approach, impairing their ability to carry out their respective Charter activities—ultimately to the detriment of the communities they serve (ABC and SBS, 2011: 4).

It must be noted that the argument here is not that the ABC and SBS should undertake television programming that is without regard to the standards that are applied for the commercial broadcasters. Indeed, both the ABC and SBS insisted that their classification approach significantly reflects and acknowledges the converged media environment in which it operates' (ABC and SBS, 2011: 7). Rather, the proposition is that it must remain the decision of the ABC and SBS Boards to independently set their classification standards in ways that have regard to those applying to other comparable media – most obviously the commercial broadcasters in this instance. To propose otherwise, it was argued, would be to 'change the accountability frameworks applying to the national broadcasters ... [and] reduce their independence' (ABC and SBS, 2011: 8).

Convergence Review

In its Interim Report, released in December 2011, the Convergence Review Committee proposed that media regulations relating to local content, ownership thresholds and community standards would apply primarily to what it termed Content Service Enterprises (CSEs) (DBCDE, 2011). In order to differentiate CSEs from smaller media outlets as well as user-created content, the Convergence Review proposed the application of a threshold test for CSEs that would consider: (1) revenue generated from Australian users; (2) size of Australian audience; and (3) whether the media provider distributed content which was primarily produced by media professionals. The Interim Report did not explicitly exempt the ABC or SBS from CSE status, and it elsewhere recommended that ABC Television should be obligated

to meet a local content transmission quota similar to that applied to commercial broadcasters.

The ABC's response to the Convergence Review was similar to that for the ALRC Inquiry, as it was argued that obligating public broadcasters to meet regulatory requirements similar to those applied to commercial media would threaten their statutory independence. Noting that the Interim report identified the need for a converged media regulator, the ABC observed that it was 'silent on the relationship between the national broadcasters and the proposed converged industry regulator'.

The argument was made that:

To give a future converged industry regulator greater input into the editorial processes of the ABC and SBS would significantly change the basis on which the national broadcasters operate. It would also impose a more onerous governance regime comprising their existing accountability obligations and those that apply to the rest of the industry for no defined public benefit or improved outcome in terms of content or standards.

Independence from all vested interests, particularly those of the Government of the day, is a central characteristic of effective public broadcasters around the world. It underpins their responsibility to provide impartial news and information services that support democratic institutions and serve the needs of the public as a whole. It also provides public broadcasters with the ability to take the creative risks required to innovate and reflect cultural diversity (ABC, 2012: 2).

Again, the argument is not that the ABC wishes to diverge significantly from other broadcasters in terms of local content or community standards. Rather, the argument is that the decision to comply with such requirements must remain at the discretion of the Board itself:

The Corporation believes strongly that the determination of the content standards that apply to its programming is, and should remain, a matter solely for the ABC Board to determine through the process of determining codes of practice in relation to programming matters on ABC services. Should the Committee determine that changes to the content standards applying to the wider industry be required, an appropriate level of harmonisation with the Corporation's standards is likely to flow from the ABC Board's obligation to take account of the standards determined by the regulator from time to time (ABC, 2012: 16).

The ABC does acknowledge that 'digital technology has provided the ABC with the opportunity to transform the way in delivers content and engages with its audiences'. However, it is reluctant to see this as providing a strong basis for changing regulatory practices, even if these were formed in a pre-Internet environment of platform-specific media:

The Corporation believes, however, that a cautious approach is required. While technological convergence challenges Government to ensure the continued effectiveness of policy settings in a changing environment, it does

not require changes where existing regulatory settings continue to deliver against policy goals.

Proposals to extend the ambit of regulation should be carefully scrutinised for their potential to inhibit innovation and investment to the detriment of Australian industry and consumers. Likewise, suggestions to extend the jurisdiction of the regulator must demonstrate that existing self-regulatory or co-regulatory arrangements are ineffective. In both cases, a clearly articulated public policy justification beyond a simple desire for regulatory harmony needs to underpin the intervention (ABC, 2012: 16).

Independent Media Inquiry

The independent Media Inquiry (Finkelstein Review) did not release a Discussion paper or Interim Report, but rather conducted a series of open public hearings over October-November 2011, in addition to accepting public submissions responding to its Terms of Reference. The ABC prepared a Briefing Note responding to questions about its editorial policies, with particular reference to questions of Impartiality and Diversity of Perspectives (ABC, n.d.). In addition, Paul Chadwick, Director of Editorial Policies at the ABC, appeared before the Inquiry at its Sydney hearings on 18 November. In a letter accompanying submission of the briefing note, the ABC Managing Director, Mark Scott, observed that:

The position of the ABC in relation to setting and implementing content standards is so unusual that I hesitate to offer any view on whether measures tailored for the ABC could apply to commercial print and online media (Scott,

2011).

Has the exceptionalism case been advanced in these inquiries?

In general terms, my argument would be no. Both the National Classification Scheme Review and the Convergence Review chose, in their Final Reports, to address the ABC and SBS as structurally distinct entities that would not be under a statutory obligated to meet the regulatory requirements proposed for other significant media content providers. In the case of the National Classification Scheme Review, this was discussed in a section of the Final Report that explicitly discussed the ABC and SBS, and concluded:

In formulating its proposals, the ALRC did not intend to imply that changes should be made to the existing governance and accountability arrangements applying to the ABC and SBS. The special position of ABC and SBS as national public broadcasters is not under review in the context of this Inquiry, and the ALRC does not make specific recommendations in this regard (ALRC, 2012: 121).

The Convergence Review recommended application of a 55 per cent local transmission quota for the ABC's main television channel, and a 27.5 per cent quota for SBS1, as well as an updating of the Charter of both organisations to 'expressly reflect the range of existing services, including online activities, currently provided' (DBCDE, 2012: xv). It took the view, however, that both the ABC and SBS should be exempt from any requirement to be involved in a future news standards body, as their

own Charters and codes and procedures provide a sufficient safeguard in relation to news standards. In this latter respect, it differed from the Independent Media Inquiry, which argued that the ABC and SBS could be subject to the jurisdiction of its proposed News Media Council, ‘for complaints about standards of reporting news and current affairs (which is currently overseen by ACMA)’ (Independent Inquiry into the Media and Media Regulation, 2012: 296).

What we have, ultimately, is an argument for the *status quo*, or at least that reforms proposed for other parts of the media should not apply to the national public broadcasters, even if they are reshaping themselves to respond to media convergence as other media institutions are; in many instances doing it very successfully. This would be a similar outcome to the reform initiatives of the late 1980s and early 1990s that led to the *Broadcasting Services Act 1992*, where s. 13 (5) states ‘except as expressly provided by this Act, the regulatory regime established by this Act does not apply to national broadcasting services’. In the case of the *Broadcasting Services Act*, it can be argued that the ecology of broadcasting is distinct, and the public broadcasters exist to some degree in a complementary relationship to the commercial broadcasters.

But does this continue to be the case across media platforms? I would argue that the distinction between professional media content and user-created content has become as important, if not more so, as the commercial/non-commercial media distinction, and the ABC and SBS clearly sit on the professional side of that ledger. The question of how to situate public service media in future media legislation, and the continuing

relevance of the case for exceptionalism in the convergent media policy environment, remain questions to be further debated.

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¹ I discuss the SBS digital strategy in more detail in Flew, 2011.